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SADAKICHI HARTMANN

SCHOPENHAUER IN THE AIR

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AUTHOR'S EDITION

NEW YORK, 1899

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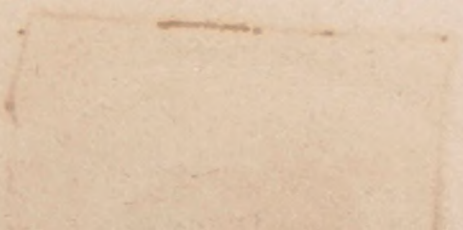
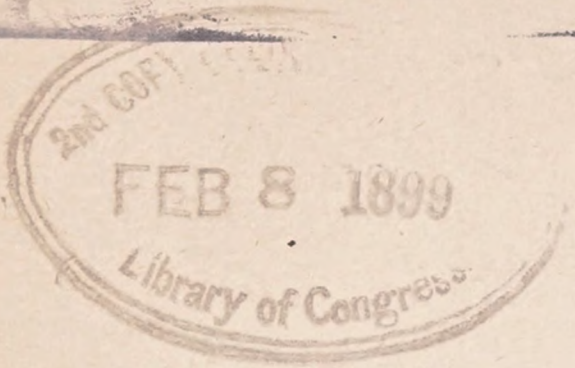
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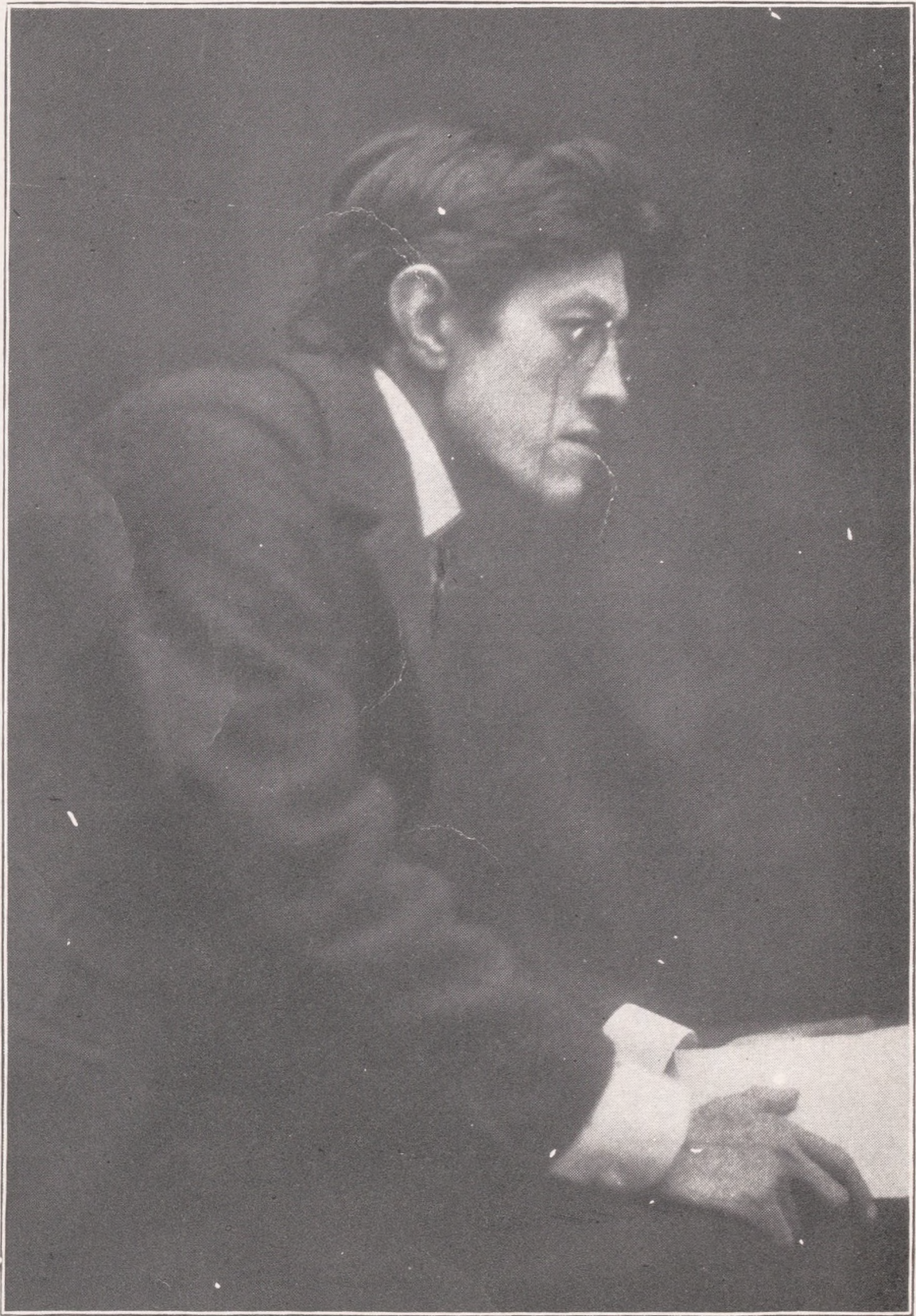


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Sadakiichi Hartmann.

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To A. P. Ryder.

SCHOPEHAUER IN THE AIR.

(1894.)

It was a dismal grey-in-grey evening, the atmosphere laden with moisture, as if it had not the energy to condense into rain, like forlorn moods of world strangeness and nostalgia when the human soul would seek relief in weeping and finds itself incapable of tears.

Under an old battered lamp post whose head was bent to one side as if weary of its vain endeavor to brighten that cheerless scene, a little girl with folded arms and crouching head crouched on the curbstones. Only when a slight draught floated through the broken panes of the lantern, the flickering flame shed a vague, hasty glare over the dry, haggard form of the little minx, whose dull eyes were seen to throw searching glances along the gutter, as if in quest of some unknown treasure hidden in the mud.

Suddenly she started up, her eyes, growing wide, had caught sight of something lying within her hand's reach,— a little pale green lump; she stretched out her foot and examined it with her toes. It was a single grape, slightly rotten on one side, that had dropped into the gutter. On recognizing what it was, she picked it up with greedy fingers, while her homely, careworn face became distorted with a grinning grimace, which was meant for joy. She began to suck the little fruit, and her harsh features assumed an air of gentleness for the moment, that relaxed as soon as the pleasure was over, into that phlegmatic expression of despair, which in older beings interprets disgust of life.

The occasional passers-by hardly noticed her; the picture she made was so insignificant in composition, so faded in tone, without the slightest suggestion of brightness in her

dirty face, streaky hair and ragged, patched clothes, that it disappeared entirely in the background of the muddy pavement, on which the reflections of the lantern glimmered like luring gold.

Had she been older, one would have supposed she was thinking, but the little girl had not yet learned to think, nor was she really conscious of or responsible for the stammering expressions of her soul battered like the lamp post. In her mind one blurred picture followed the other, and these impressions made out her life, as they make out that of every child, and also that of many growth-up persons, but hers were all steeped in mud like her feet. They were like figures we see with closed eyes, weaving to an fro in a room deprived of light, the forms and meanings of which we cannot define. Only now and then some object stood out in that chaos of sombre colors,—a huge beer pitcher which she could hardly carry when filled—rings of spilt liquor—a broken pipe—a hairy fist on the table—two drunken forms in a squalid room—a stagnant atmosphere never purified with sunshine, and with them all the associations of sound, familiar to her: coarse laughter, hoarse voices, curses and bestial exclamations.

A stout, blear-eyed wench brushing the face of the little girl with her greasy, rose-colored wrapper, stepped off the sidewalk to cross the street. She saw that spot of color waddling across the sunken, filthy pavement and disappearing in the frivolity of a nocturnal scene formed by a loafing crowd before a lighted saloon on the opposite sidewalk. For a moment she felt like following that luring apparition and, after wading through the mire of sin, losing herself in that deluding brightness. But she did not give way to the temptation and remained as before in her crouching position, with gloomy face. Her unconscious meditation returned to the former pictures, which grew darker and still darker, the web of her consciousness being spun without the former threads of blackish blue and red.

The shrill sound of a bell! An ambulance dashed through the street. Men and women interrupted their flirtation

and craned their necks with curious astonishment to witness an event so commonplace in a large city, but nevertheless, an excitement, a vibration, a break in the appalling, unbearable monotony of routine life.

The little girl had also risen, but slowly, not like the others, and now moved along slowly, as if by mere accident, in the same direction. Her thin legs gradually moved in a quicker rhythm, and aimless she pressed forward with her head still crouching and swaying abruptly from side to side, along the long street with its dark rows of tenement houses, one looking exactly like the other, and indicating by their dismal similarity that they also shelter human beings, leading, one exactly like the other, a monotonous routine life, minute for minute, and score for score, void of all ideal pleasures, and growing darker and more deserted towards its end, like the streets as the little outcast neared the river.

The oppressing atmosphere, spreading like a veil of despondency over city and seeming to absorb all sounds and colors, bored itself without pity into every sensitive soul. Poets and artists hastened into the taverns or to their own humble homes, for to abandon oneself, like the little girl, to the atmosphere of such a night might prove dangerous to one's pulse.

Suddenly she found herself at the end of the wharf, looking into the water, lapping against the framework like the soft caresses of living hands. Before her lay the river, a dark, sluggishly floating mass, on whose surface the convulsive play of rising and falling waves was hardly perceptible. In the distance a few forlorn lights blinked like the solitary moments of joy in our life of disappointment. The outlines of huge storehouses, looking like medieval castles with towers and turrets in the dim atmosphere, suggested vague reveries to her, never felt before. Profound silence lay on the river. Only far from the distance a melancholy melody was wafted over; some boatsman playing on a harmonica. Then a ferryboat with its many lighted windows floated by like a phantom. Was it a vision of our life, so full of delusion, so beautiful, and yet nothing but a passing show—transparent glass and artificial light?

The little girl stood for a long time on the extreme edge of the framework ; she had raised her head and breathed slowly and calmly ; her face looked less gloomy. Suddenly she straightened herself, opened her arms as if to embrace that night with all its dark dreams and desires—a little black figure fell—a splash in the water—a suppressed scream that almost sounded like a laugh of satisfaction—then everything grew silent as before, only where the child had disappeared the circles on the dark and desolate flood became wider and wider until they met with the foaming keel water of the phantom boat of happiness, that invariably glides by on the gray river of our life.

To James McNeil Whistler.

MAGNOLIA BLOSSOMS.

(1894.)

On both sides a mile's expanse of water, calm and dark ; in the distance the sombre silhouettes of proud, towering cedar trees, festooned with grapevines ; here and there the lighted villa of a sugar plantation ; seldom a free vista on prairie land, and even then a dim line indicating that the forest was not far off.

What a night it was! My soul had left its body to lose itself in the wild unrestrained beauty around me—from where it came—and only left a trembling suggestion of its existence within me. The other passengers moved around me like shadows, and again and again my eyes drank in all the glory and wealth of that night.

And then suddenly, I felt that something which concerned me came towards me: a female form. I wanted to step aside ; before I could accomplish it, we stood opposite each other, perhaps only for a few seconds, perchance for a minute, drawn by irresistible powers towards each other, and in that moment I was with one stroke brought back to

the earth ; all that dream of silver and grey faded and made the river look a weary waste of monotony.

My mind resented that a woman, a perfect stranger, could have such power over me ; I tried to lose myself again in the scene around me, in vain ! The stranger with her large, dark eyes had captivated me, and however I struggled to resist I had to look again and again at her seductive form.

There she stood, proud and erect, like an incarnation of tempting womanhood, like the magnolia trees on the banks, a beauty too abundant in strength to bend even under the storms of sorrow, taciturn, not trembling and whispering at the slightest breeze. She was dressed in black without a glimpse of color to relieve the vague severity of her appearance. Although her melancholy garb was tightly fitting to her figure there was no impression of dry rigidity, on the contrary a certain looseness, that made me involuntarily think of the magnolia leaf: dark and polished on the surface, soft and silvery below. At last, something in her features, around her eyes, that told she was no longer young and inexperienced.

I meditated on the strange coincidences in our journey of life, how accidents now and then, for a fleeting moment, brings together two human beings, who probably will never cross each other's path again, and yet who in that momentary meeting feel that they could get along tolerably well together in this world. And how the recollection of this woman in black, as the months and years pass on, might sink deeper and deeper into the unconscious caverns of my memory, lose its outlines, melt together with other similar impressions and dissolve into that chaos of latent vibrations of which eroticism, the motive power of all life, consists ; and how after years, perchance in some melancholy mood, by glancing at some object, or hearing some noise on the street, or some other suggestion bursting forth from the momentary environment, I might become conscious of a vague light spot amid reminiscences of the past, and trying to solve

the mystery, suddenly perceive the vision of the woman in black in a moonlight night on the Mississippi river.

She was leaning with her elbow on the railing, cheek in hands, like Melpomene of old, gazing at the magnolia swamps. Was it the odor of their large white blossoms wafted across the water, or did she herself exhale that heavy perfume which oppressed my senses!

My worship of nature had changed into that of humanity, I longed to loose myself in another human soul.

I felt like stepping up and speaking to her, yet somehow I could not overcome a certain shyness within me, I had not the courage to surmount the conventional barriers; instead I imagined how I might approach her, what words I would use and what she would answer, and these imagineries—likely more beautiful than the reality could ever be—urged me with new temptations at every step. Irresolute, disgusted with my cowardice, I paced up and down and whenever I came near her, our eyes searched for each other, but in our mutual excitement, timidity and embarrassment they often failed to meet and their union was never as spontaneous and vehement as in the first recognition of our affinity. Yet, I was convinced, were I to find the opportunity to make the most commonplace remark about the beautiful moonlit night to her, we would have known before the first faltering phrases of a conversation had been interchanged, that—to us the most natural thing in the world—we were two of those human beings who belonged to each other completely. And could it be that in a few hours, at our place of destination, the currents of human civilization would sweep her in one direction and me in another—never to meet each other again and wilfully dispensing with an acquaintance that might have meant happiness to both of us!

She now turned, looking over the railing into the moonlit waters, flowing, incessantly flowing, like the hours of our life to the sea of oblivion.

Did she know how defenceless a woman in that position is to the scrutinising glances of men, not capable of taking

in all the details of a woman's appearance directly under the gaze of her eyes. The physiognomy of her back was at my mercy. The proud carriage of her shoulders! What supple sweeping curves from her arm to hip! How flat the line of the spinal cord, yet how elastic!—Yet what was this! Why were the corners of my mouth all at once cynically drawn down as in disgust? Why did all my exalted feelings about woman's worth and beauty tumble together into a meaningless heap? Why did I just at that moment perceive that the moon was hiding behind clouds and darkness lay upon the mighty sweeping flood as on my soul?

I saw her dark dress broken by the glimpse of something white.

How hopelessly indecent all sex relations are in our nervous, colorless age! Everything is so suggestive, so hopelessly risqué in a woman's dress; if two buttons of her waist are open, or if she lifts her skirt we feel embarrassed, for everything in nature is so cruelly distorted by modern dress, by our habits, by the arts, the brutality of men, and the vanity of women themselves. Everywhere immaculate lilies with debauchery in the debts of their chalices!

I shivered and, glancing up, saw how anxiously she stared at me, as if she were afraid some ill had befallen me, and then she looked at me with that look which men usually cannot resist, begging for all we had lost. I cruelly, painfully shook my head, and confused, she hastened downstairs with a staggering step.

I knew that we two could not sit together in the moonlight, with that seductive perfume in the air, with the apparent affinity of our souls, without falling into the banalities of life; and a commonplace pressure of the hand, even a kiss would have been a sacrilege in the vast cathedral of nature, whose soundless symphonies again broke into my soul.

To W. D. Howells.

CRITICAL MOMENTS.

(1894.)

The door bell rang timidly as if avoiding unnecessary noise.

The mother, starting up from her dejection, ejaculated: "The doctor!" then in an ardent undertone: "Virgin Mary, save, oh save my child."

The father made a gesture: "Now we will see," and nodding complacently shuffled into the hall; he returned next moment with a spectacled young man, who by his nervous mien, assuming notwithstanding an air of importance, showed his inexperience.

He hastily opened his bag and stepped to the lounge where a little boy lay bedded among pillows and sheets: a long, narrow, emaciated form, like a figure drawn by Grünewald.

The kerosene lamp spread its spare light on the faded red cover on the table, leaving the rest of the sultry room in semi-darkness. A faint odor of perfumes seemed to lay on every object. The clock ticked offensively loud, telling with every second that a human life neared its end. A half-finished meal stood on the mantelpiece, its drapery moved sadly with every draught. Now and then the window panes trembled when the Elevated passed by.

The mother, with beating heart, busied herself in the adjoining kitchen, brewing some medicaments which her neighbor, a gossiping old maid had recommended to her.

The father, with lips slightly apart, stupid and helpless, as men generally are at such moments, stood behind the doctor.

The doctor at once felt the seriousness of the case, shrugged his shoulder and asked for the lamp. The father moved the table awkwardly to the bedside, and stared at the trembling shadows on the ceiling.

The doctor felt the child's pulse, sitting down on the edge of the couch, whereby he upset a glass of water ; he looked embarrassed at the carpet consuming the moisture, and forgot to count.

The father also glanced down with an expression which seemed to imply : " That doesn't matter—but the child, its all over, isn't it? "

The young doctor continued to count, moving his lips rapidly, then took the temperature, and felt the pulse again. It was his first case of the kind ; at college he had always neglected children diseases—why bother with them if there are such things as female complaints in the world—and now in his anxiety he realized that he did not know any more than the parents about the ailment of his patient, whose breath was scarcely audible at times. He only felt that the child was very sick and probably would die under his hands. Why hadn't he refused to come at this late hour.

Suddenly boisterous dance music and the noise of gliding footsteps interrupted the silence.

" What is that? " asked the spectacles. He still held the hand of his patient not knowing what to do , endeavoring in vain to remember something he had never known.

" The Hungarians upstairs celebrate a wedding. "

" My, how can they—I would— "

" They don't care, they all have more children than they want. "

" That's so, " smiled the doctor, " yes, yes, they come rather quick, don't they—therefore one does not feel their loss—excuse me—I mean— "

" But this is our only one, " came plaintively from the kitchen. "

" Oh, is it, " cold perspiration stood on his forehead. What should he say, surely he had to say something, and he desperately groped about in his bag.

Then it grew silent again in the little sick-room ; above the floor shook with a droning sound under the stamping measures of a Czarda as far as it can be indulged in in a little flat.

The confused screaming of joy intermingling with the music that poured through the open windows, ablaze with light, into the otherwise so silent street, told all curious neighbors that the intoxication of wine and the senses had well intermingled, that at least in this flat there were people who believed they were happy.

“Well?” The mother came back from the kitchen, looking at the two men with an enquiring, imploring look.

The doctor, in despair at his ignorance, shook his perspiring head, with tears of shame in his eyes, which the good people took for sympathy.

She shaded the lamp with a newspaper, so that the light did not fall on the face of him whose birth had almost cost her life, in deep thought took up the little ten-cent china statue of the Virgin Mary and put it down again, then nodding her head in silent prayer, she sank down in a chair, her hands folded in her lap.

“What good will that do?” said the husband, almost roughly, drawing his underlip forward.

“Oh, God can not be so cruel to take him away from us.”

“Well, pray on and see if he will help us. Damn it, I wish he could!”

“I won't believe in God any more if he takes him away from me.”

The husband paced softly up and down, now and then stopping to put things in order on the mantelpiece, or brushing with his hand one piece or another of his scant wardrobe hanging in a corner. He thought of the religious quarrels he had so often had with his wife, fierce quarrels, as they both were stupidly bigoted, he in his unbelief, she in her faith.

“Damn religion altogether! If the child would only live!” and he thrust his hands into the pockets of his pants. How much had he to pay that doctor, anyhow, who sat there so glum without saying a word. One dollar, two dollars, or even three dollars—he had only a five dollar bill, how could he change it in the meanwhile?

The doctor had a faint smile on his lips, ready to grin nervously at any moment, should they look at him.

The noise upstairs continued. It seemed the bride and bridegroom had left, and the remaining guests behaved more frantic than before. Why not! Such chances of enjoying ourselves at the expenses of others after all do not occur so often in life. And the young people, madly whirling about, grew intoxicated with each other's presence, and in hungry silly flirtation realized a foretaste of the disenchantment of married life.

Below the cold hand of the dying child lay still in the trembling fingers of the doctor, who suddenly let it fall, and with unsteady eyes, and blanched face, motioned for more light.

The father mechanically seized the lamp and held it with a nerveless arm.

The mouth of his child lay open, a round black hole, the cheeks were hollow, a dark violet ring under the eyes, the white of which had turned a disagreeable bluish-yellow. The hair, without a trace of light, lay in lank strings around his face, and the shadow of his nose almost looked comical, the father held the light so low.

“Dead.”

“Dead!”

“Dead!” a frightful scream rang through the room, and drowned the noise above. Her fingers had groped tremblingly over the clammy body of her child.

She clenched her fists and bursting into ghastly laughter, tore the agnus dei from her breast and flung it into a corner.

The band upstairs struck up a maddening gallop.

“Come, let us be gay with the Hungarians,” and she sank sobbing to the ground. In this chaotic moment of dull piercing pain she had not only lost her child, but also her faith.

The father stood nodding in the middle of the room. “This had to come, but,—” there was a confusion of ideas in him; he wanted to say some word of consolation; he tried to express something, but could not, something of

that we all feel in the critical moments of our life, but which we never utter, as our human language is insufficient. And as if he knew that only music could express such tumult and agony, he grunted a few inarticulate sounds . . . , ending with, "Well, we must bear it—but as the old woman said, this was our only one," then he felt relieved; his greatest pain was over.

— — —

The young doctor had sneaked away without giving the father a chance to pay him. It was a sad experience; he might have died anyhow—yet a sting of conscience made him take up the neglected study, and to-day he is considered on the Eastside an expert on children's diseases.

—◆—

To D. W. Tryon.

DREARY WINDBLOWN YELLOW MEADS.

(1896.)

—

The light of an April afternoon sifted through the wind-torn edges of dark clouds, surging across a muddy sky, and etched large arabesques on the straw-colored, breeze-stirred, tufts of sedge, densely covering the shore. The tumult of civilization lay far behind this wide and level landscape, where only on the horizon an outline rose, blotchy and confused, indicating village life. The smell of the brine was wafted across the scanty plains, but the sea itself was merely a silvery stretch in the distance. And on this peaceful long-drawn afternoon this barren unfavored stretch of land lay in silent dread of the travails of spring, when everything in nature is reborn, good and bad alike.

The dark figure of a lonesome wanderer stood amidst these pale yellow reeds, dreaming into this scene of desolation. From the soft pallor of his forehead fluttered a stream of dark hair like a discord. The water of the marshes was

running through his broken shoes and the cold drew together his lean and shivering figure. And not a tree nearby to huddle close to for warmth! His attitude revealed an estrangement from the ordinary clan of humanity. He was so world-forlorn and world-weary, and yet so world-defiant as if he were one of the martyrs of humanity, in whom are concentrated all the esthetic aspirations of a generation which hates him, because he is thus nobly endowed.

His thoughts roved aimless. Reminiscences rose ghost-like within him, while he stared at the shifting patches of glowing light, determining in rhythmic motion the outline of shadows, tempered by lorn caresses of the wind, until his eyes began to burn, and the picture before him grew more indistinct. He searched in himself. There shimmered something bright and luring. Could he but grasp it! Alas, it proved too fleeting. When he began to realize it, it seemed to be an illusion. Ah, if he could garner it as his own, bestow it upon future generations, not with common words in the common way as common rhymsters absolve their duties. A new style! Vibrating luminous aromatic sounds, strangely fascinating in their fanatic beauty and mechanism of despair.

His vision grew more and more unconscious of the outside world; it reflected the voluptuous luminousness of a dream. Substances became shadowy, and shadows grew substantial.

A garden of fairyland lay before him in the magical flush of night, where white jeweled-chaliced flowers glowed in flavorful florescence, and large fantastic fireflies, never beheld by earthly eyes, fluttered around colored lanterns, strung beneath the foliage arches of luminant trees. And in the midst of all this glimmering mystic gayety without sounds and echoes, withering into uncertain darkness, stood, in an attitude of hopeless consecration, ever leal to a hopeless fate, the pale phantom of a woman lithe and childlike, with lips tremulous with weeping; her black hair flooding in dark waves the dia-

phanous veils—girt loosely around her hips—in the soft nuances of dying flowers. On her brow a soft wreath of stars shone, cold and sad. He tried to animate this spectacle with more radiating color. But however ardently he groped amid the treasures of his fancy and viscerated each evanescent emotion of his soul, he could not find a more luminous diadem, or a smile for her pallid face. Amid these vain endeavors the features of the dreamland scene and his beloved one became more and more blurred; the lyrical weirdness and the sentiments of loneliness and awe around him, touched his soul with faint indefinable accords. It was as if his eyes opened for the first time upon that struggling light and shade, upon those dreary windblown yellow meads with the acrid smell of the sea-washed soil, and the stillness of the distance under the far-stretching roof of the darkening heaven; a picture in which nature was not dead, but seemed to hold her breath, calling forth in his soul faint tremors, ethereal shimmering sounds that floated upwards—then a vibrant pause—a silence of suspension, of the faint-hearted heaviness preceding creation.

Abruptly the stillness was broken, the mighty flapping of wings cut the air, and a raven, like a sinister warning from some supermundane realm, a ghost from the Walpurgis night, ploughed through the dim senescent atmosphere, slowly winged its way over the straw-colored desolation and dominated the whole scene.

And the poet gazed after the apparition until it was lost like a dark spot on the horizon and the sound of its wingbeat had died away, and the misery of his existence and the self-sacrifice of womanhood as the fiery undercurrents of his mind, he conceived in one of those moments of ecstasy and pain—ever barred to you, Philistines, and which are worth a whole lost life—the idea which gave to the world “The Raven.”

To Augustus St. Gaudens.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN A LIGHTHOUSE.

(1895.)

After several months of bitter want, heart-pangs such as only a sensitive author endures, and that severe mental exhaustion brought about by irregular unsympathetic work, every line being a humiliation and degradation of artistic instincts, a feeling of emptiness in my brain with other neurasthenic symptoms began to torture me, depriving me of my two main occupations and pleasures, in making reading impossible and also rendering writing at times extremely difficult.

I am obliged to mention this physical decadence, as nothing else could have induced me to hire a boat one sunny noon, and slowly row away from the turmoil of the streets, far, far away into the bay, to one of the lighthouses.

Although in my nervous vagrom city life, I was always conscious of a yearning desire to forget for a few moments my everlasting cares—the fabrication of another hack article on the German Emperor's wardrobe, a fictive meeting with Zola in a coal mine, or a review of a new opera by Verdi dated Milano and written in a New York garret, in order to pay a part of the rent, to buy the new work of a favorite author, to see some great actor simulate emotion, or to dine badly in a French restaurant, in short the endeavor to make a reputation and get along somewhat decently in this world—I had after all become so saturated with it that even after being surrounded for hours by nothing but sky and land and fading shore line, I could not entirely obliterate the luring music of metropolitan noise and haste. The impression nature made on me was too overwhelming; it invariably embarrassed, enervated me; after all my various visits to the lighthouse I felt completely exhausted. I had to take an absolute rest for a day or two, and only gradually

quieted down to my normal state, when I recalled with bitterness and renewed longing, the eternal uniform music of the ocean and how sublime it was in its immeasurableness.

The lighthouse, though built on the edge of a steep, surf bound rock, was hardly that ideal place sentimental authors have kindly foisted upon us. There was no black isolation about it. A village with hideous polychromatic summer cottages, reflecting in their silly architecture the anarchism of our age, was within a mile's reach.

The keeper of the lighthouse was a taciturn old fellow, short and sturdy, a phlegmatic, self-reliant nature who could get well along without people, satisfied with smoking his pipe and growling to himself while polishing the brass of his lanterns. The bottle of Kentucky Bourbon, which I always managed to bring with me, however, made him more accessible. His wife, bred in the paltry but self-satisfied comfort of the middle classes, was one of those creatures who can not get accustomed to new ways, thus she longed for the days when she went shopping in her native town, promenaded on the avenues with a wasp waist and spotted tulle veil, and drove out on Sundays with her best young man. Now she had to bring up "her brats," and the isolation of her curious little home and paralian existence seemed to weigh upon her commonplace character.

On one of these visits towards the end of the year, the idea struck me that it would be quite a novel experience to arrange a genuine German Christmas Eve in the lighthouse, and I promised the lighthousekeeper's wife and children to show up when Christmas came, however lack of funds prevented me; the following year the stormy weather made the trip impossible. At last, after two years of postponement, I arrived toward dusk, with a Christmas tree, boxes of candles, and candies, and a few other insignificant presents in my boat. The old keeper recognized me at once and grinned as I shook my bottle of Bourbon whiskey at him. His wife greeted me cordially: "I am glad that you have come, it would have otherwise been so lonely here to-night."

We lugged up the tree, and decorated it and fastened the candles. After supper we lit them. The children looked with astonished, wide-open eyes at the shimmering tree, and after having lost their first moment's shyness began to prance and dance about and shout with joy. The old keeper gulped down one glass of toddy after the other, the mother smiled, and I recalled with joy my childhood days, when for weeks I thought of nothing but Christmas, being hardly able to sleep with excitement for some nights preceding ; until at last the hour of jubilation came, realizing the wishes I had harbored with childish impatience for so many days.

It was an hour of wild invigorating joy. But just as in all those exquisite and far between moments in our life's errantry, when we have at last succeeded in finding a cosy corner where we may rest a while, instead of enjoying it completely, we begin to feel restless and long for something else ; and after listening repeatedly to the cadences of wind and waves outside, bringing reminiscences of the land-maddening emotions of large cities, I stepped out upon the platform.

Darkness surrounded me. A black, dark sky, without stars, melting imperceptibly into a still darker sea. A monotonous roar like the majestic rythms of Whitman's thoughts, greeted me. From the East the tide came rolling in, waves on waves, billows on billows. The very depths of the ocean rose in deep furrowed mountains, crumbling instantly into foaming rotations, followed by a momentary viscous lethargy, undertowing a new upheaval of the sea. The world-old hosts of Neptune in long stretched line, dully outlined by their grey glimmering caps, row after row in regular distances, stormed seething onward, as if chasing each other. And far beneath me they shattered their effervescent heads on the stone-work and the foam crept high up the masonry. After each attack the roaring and raging grew louder, and the hissing waters cursing their aimless agitation were thrown back in different directions, crossing the eager approach of their sister waves obliquely.

The wind played wildly in my disheveled hair. With my hands on the railing, the wide interminable ocean beneath me, the platform, where I stood, seemed like a link between human habitation and eternity, life and death.

And as my eyes looked out with dreamy bewilderment, I saw a white spot rapidly coming towards me: a sea-gull with fluttering wings dashed directly towards the luring light of the lantern, like a solitary human soul rushing blindly towards happiness, striving with selfish zeal to reach a haven of rest in the beautiful soft glow of a peaceful home. In the next moment she shattered her head against the thick panes of the beacon light and fell writhing to my feet.

Stooping, to touch the soft white down of the unfortunate bird, who only a moment before had been so full of vigorous joy, a feeling of despair came over me, realizing that all this endeavor to create something beautiful in this world of rising and falling waves and howling winds, was sheer vanity. The sombre depth seemed to beckon to me, to leave the black monotony of universal mirk, with all its atrocities and infamies, and to tumble back into chaos, whence I came. No paltry exit from this tragical farce with revolver, rope or Paris green, but to leap consciously with heroic joy into eternity.

I trembled with emotion. The ocean, darkness, death, eternity, stormed over my soul in that moment of supremest joy, such as is granted to us perhaps a dozen times in our entire life, for which we have patiently to wait, and then make the best of it. With protruding eyes I scanned the abyss and fiercely clutched the iron railing, when an odor of fir was wafted to me and a warm breath of the homewise scene within, like a love-woven nursery song, caressed my senses.

My arms dropped. A complete exhaustion came over me. I still endeavored to force my emotion to soar to the majestic storm-swept summits where man willingly embraces death, but my thoughts had already turned to less imposing heights. I had learned to understand why we poor decrepit

mortals cling to our existence. Needing so much skill and strength even to struggle and float on the tempestuous waves of life, how could we have the superhuman courage to dissolve in it !



To Amelie Rives.

UNDER THE BIRCH TREES.

(1893.)

Yes, if on that evening I had known that earthly happiness can be conjured up from the folly of existence merely by forcing ourselves to enjoy pain, many things would be different—whether for better or worse—I do not dare to decide.

Just on this spot we sat—about this time of the year—while leaf after leaf fell from the birch trees with a soft crackling noise and were carried away by the tepid wind. It was the hour of twilight ; below our feet lay the city wrapt in the rising mists of darkness, then as to-day the river wound its way around the city.

Hand in hand we gazed at the sunset. It was no sunset of fiery insuperable colors to intoxicate poets and painters with melancholy inspiration. On that evening the sky faded vaguely, imperceptibly, from blue to night, in diluted variations of green. And it seemed as if the paleness of her face and her white dress had absorbed all light and radiated it, while surrounding nature dissolved into dusk. Like a misty vision she rested on the brownish green of this sloping hill.

We did not speak. Our souls were so saturated with nature, the under-vibration of that vast purgatory of emotion which men call love, that we obeyed every suggestion of its timeless eloquence.

Have you ever loved—trivial question to be sure—yet I mean, really, truly loved, not merely infatuated for the body's sake, but that the welfare of your heart and brain depended on the mutual stimulation of love? I sincerely believe that scarcely two or three out of a hundred human beings experience self oblivious love, and can we therefore wonder at life being so cheerless, so unbearable to all those who have some kind of a soul, and have not yet learned to enjoy pain as I do.

Our love, though not platonic, not free from devouring kisses and vulgar flirtation, was wholesome and world-defiant. On that evening all was calm and pure, yet intense, almost bordering on pain. Rochegrosse, I believe, could understand that feeling, but Cazin would paint it better. Our existences were in a deeper, closer embrace than the most nervous and supremely physical fusion could ever effect. Tremor after tremor of bliss vibrated through my frame. The world seemed out of joint, and the air moving in large, mighty rhymes around us.

So we sat, wrapped in the poetry of our love, forlorn, excluded into a world of dreams, and the very silhouettes our love-drunk forms made against the pale green sky must have been such a sentimental painter would select for a picture—and yet how did it come about, that on that same evening I took the express train for New York, never to see her again?

Strange to say, there was no confession, misunderstanding or quarrel which generally brings about such changes; we did not offend each other with rude words. The change took place as rapidly and imperceptibly as the colors of the sunset. We were sitting utterly silent, in the same position, while leaf after leaf fell from the birch trees with a soft crackling noise and were carried off by the tepid wind.

If it were possible to explain such sudden changes of feeling which often determine a life's happiness, I would trace it to the moment when, pressing her head with a loving tremor against my breast, she glanced up at me and I looked over her shoulder, and the profile of her body suddenly re-

vealed deficiencies, deficiencies of curves almost typical of our American women, which though they tell of refinement, also denote degeneration of the female physical form. One might get along, after all. Condensed milk is as good as mother's milk, and Rubens' "Susannah" is too fat and vulgar, after all. But then deficiencies of form suggest deficiencies of intellect and emotion. I should discover more and more faults in her that would irritate me, excite my temper, render me indifferent to her, and it would finally be only a waste of energy in plaguing each other about a lost hairpin or a bad cigar. So marriage, I reasoned, without realizing my thoughts at the moment, is after all but a lottery; even the truest love cannot assure us the great prize of happiness, without considering the question at all, whether the great prize is really ever awarded or not.

I was afraid of going the risk. I did not know then that happiness can only be found in oneself and never in another person. Association with a friend, a wife, one's own children may be the supreme fire, kindling and warming one's whole existence, whose loss would paralyze a part of the soul, but after all, it has nothing to do with happiness. The bite of a mosquito at the funeral of one's wife would outweigh all emotion for the moment. Therefore the choosing of a companion for life is not as important as one generally thinks. One may prove as good as another. And as I held her in my arms and the dread of living life in its full strength (*i. e.*, of venturing, as one can foretell nothing), a weakness which has become natural to us in our crippled state, tormented me, I felt that she, conscious of my thought, was making an effort to solve what troubled my brain.

Had the sunset only been blood-red, the color might have inspired her animal spirits, she might have bored her lips into mine, and led me over the very deficiencies into the intoxication of the senses!

But the pale green sky grew more and more sombre with every moment, the landscape became more and more steeped in gray, and also her figure grew as monotonous in color

as the stump of a neighboring tree. She stared into my eyes, and tried to solve the mystery that hardened my lips and sunk my eyes into my white wan face. And gazing into each other's faces, it seemed to me as if we had entirely changed, as if all those features that had been lovely to us had assumed a disagreeable ashen hue. A disgust of life, like the last streak of green in the horizon, so intense, so painful and so weird, that one could almost love it for its weirdness, had come over us. And still the leaves fell one by one from the birch trees with a soft, crackling noise, and were carried away by the tepid wind.

"The grass is wet," she murmured, and, as if by agreement, we rose together, suffering in every atom, unhappy, despairing, without interchanging our feeling by a word, a look, or a tremor of affinity in our swooning bodies.

We walked along side by side, but with a greater distance between us than there had been for many a day. As we passed a briar rosebush, she stretched out her hand to gather a rose, the branch broke off, and the frightened birds nestling in the tree flew away. Drops of dew hung on the broken flower, which was doomed to die before the evening had closed. As she showed it to me with a slow, painful gesture, I felt that like the last reflection of ebbing light in the landscape, also love was fading in my soul.

To Mary C. Wilkins.

THE WIFE OF THE SYMBOLIST.

(1896.)

With an absent-minded look, she still held the knob of the door, through which a visitor had just departed, and softly nodding, she gazed at a book, with a yellow cover in her hand.

It impressed quaintly to see one of those vulgar, sensational books associated with this tall refined woman, whose every line and feature revealed that she moved in an

ideal world of her own, one of those women in whose presence I could sit silently for hours, dreaming and content.

To this book, just frivolous enough to please the common herd without offending them, they owed their last happy years of married life, their long-planned trip to Europe, the education of her daughters, and the independence of her widowhood, that she could live alone with her books, in the fragrance of a peaceful world-secluded home.

What agony the hypocrisy of this book must have cost him! Through its pages gleamed nothing of his curious jewelled art; over there in the bookcase, in the place of honor stood, those few thin pamphlets twisted in silver rhythms and studded with thought, into which he had breathed his soul.

He had been one of the first symbolists, long before little scribbling men and women played at the monstrous sin of the decadence, and silly little publications endeavored to dilute for American palates the sublime lesson of subtlety of Parisian symbolism. He had been of the first pioneers in an undiscovered realm, the most trying and ungrateful of all tasks in literature, demanding superior courage and enthusiasm, the merits of which are doomed to be abused and forgotten when mediocrity begins to gossip about it.

Life with such a man had not been easy. She had excused his fits of venomous temper, even pardoned his brutality when he struck her; she knew the sensitiveness and inevitableness of a poet's mind, had she not herself such a nature, although not creative. She had washed, and cooked, lived a wretched life in boarding-houses and dark flats, starved and suffered, given birth to her children in charitable institutions, and reared them amidst super-human vicissitudes, all to make him write his poetry, destined, in her belief, to rank with the best some day.

She at least had not sold her life for the benefit of milliners and dressmakers, but for solemn agitations of words that in their sifting dustwards through the strata of humanity would prove philters, evocative of new sublime dreams and endeavors, and thus, unlike other women, she had

given herself proudly, conscious of her sex, to the man of her choice, when the right moment had come, having left until then their relations pure from all those flirtations by which men usually gain women.

There in her quiet study, with its rugged, dark gray tapestry, on which *dessins* by Steinlen were hung on long blue mats in Japanesque simplicity, reflecting the whole gamut of modern life, she sat, under the golden light of an Etruscan lamp, upon her lap the "Blue Flower" which understood but by so few she had read so often until—perhaps to her alone—all the hidden meanings of every sentence and curious combinations of words had become naked and beautiful.

It told the legend of a luminous leafless flower, of deep and satiated blue, growing passionless on the abyss of steep mountains. A gay procession in carriages passes by, and the tourists bend backward, groping for the stem of these blossoms of tremulant blue, which slip out of many a hand before they are broken. And with pride and jubilation they are fastened to lukewarm bosoms and prosaic button-holes. Short is pleasure; after a few moments the blue marvel droops her head, her proud colors fade, and nothing remains but an ugly corpse. And the tourists feel pity, and good-humoredly reproach themselves, for having wilfully destroyed what was, after all, only a withering mountain dream, not realizing that on their path of life they step unconcernedly upon quite different flowers, often including those of love and their own happiness.

How deep she could look into the heart of that passion flower and build a thousand fancies from its mystic burning hues.

With a happy smile she laid it aside, and opened a parcel of rare French books just sent to her and which would lead her deeper into the significance of French symbolism and her husband's poetry.

She was soon engrossed in the odorant subtleties and vague suggestiveness of individual symbolism. The little brochure had so much in common with that of her husband.

But what is this? Surely it must be an illusion. No; it seemed to be an exact translation of the "Blue Flower," word by word, yet it bore another title. The French author had shamefully stolen it, and had become famous by it, while her husband had lived and died in obscurity. But the book had been published before her husband's, and the author was already dead when the husband issued his. Could it be possible? Her breath caught, her cheeks green ashen. In feverish haste her pale long fingers scanned the biographical notes, and became convinced of the fatal truth.

He who to her had been greater than any poet or king, the book which she had loved because she believed it the expression of his soul, the thoughts which she had treasured as his thoughts—were all a lie. And her whole martyrdom suffered in vain for a literary mountebank, a thief who had broken into another man's soul, and appropriated unscrupulously what had been there accumulated after so much mental labor and emotional anguish, no fanatic of beauty and ardent mysticist but a parvenue from the ant-hill of plebeian greed, a green grocer on the mart of material advantages. This explained his failure. His blue flower had only a borrowed soul.

She could have strangled the vampire for the vastness of his wrongs, that had drained the best life of her youth.

For ever lost that to which her memory had gone with every glimmer of moonlight that had found entrance into her study, with every sigh of wind that had rustled in the scandent vine of her porch, with every smile that had bloomed on her face, with every night that had fallen on her ascetic life.

She sank into her chair exhausted, her head dropped forwards with the unshed mist of tears in her heavily weighted eyes. The great ambition and joy of her life had vanished, and her body had become too weak to give further expression to the tempest, surging in her soul. (Poor woman, in what starlit realm did you abide, that you did know that American literature in the year of our Lord 1899 is dead, that everybody plagiarizes in this country ;

and that when in rare cases, something original is done, nobody dares to acknowledge it.)

* * *

Her daughter, a perfect image of her own dead youth, stepped in, and bending over to kiss her mother's forehead she endeavored to take the book.

"You promised to let me read it."

The mother, biting her lips in weary anguish, silently shook her head.

"Why, mother?"

"You must not read it," and she flung the book into the fire.

"But, mother, you told me that every book could be read, if done so in the right spirit."

"Yes, all others, only not this one;" and her smile was vacant, white and acrid.

* * *

The following morning the daughter lovingly caressed her mother's hair, "Why, there are a few white hairs; they must have come over night."

"Yes, I am growing old, my child," and again the bitter smile played around her lips as if cut in stone, from which no chant of laughter or melody of gladness would ever again ring out.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

BY A. T. CRAIG.

When so many write, as Phillip Brooks once said,—though it is more difficult for the writers to reach the top,—at the same time it is an advantage to the readers to have such a variety to select from and appreciate. Always, too, in spite of the mass,—the unique,—the rare and noteworthy come to the fore and hold their own. A gem of Oriental beauty has recently come into my hands, Sadakichi Hartmann's "Buddha," surely unique and rare. Mr. Hartmann is one man generally left out in the ordinary summary articles on American literature. partly because he is a foreigner, and also from the bizarre character of his writings; although he is well known through his various books, pastels and his journalistic connection.

The pages of "Buddha" carry one into scenes of tropical vegetation, where trains of camels and gorgeous religious processions pass by, and where a many-colored crowd adheres to an indolent but fierce religious worship.

A true mysticist is an exotic in American art and literature. In painting, A. P. Ryder, the painter of the "Flying Dutchman," shows this strain distinctly. In fact he and Sadakichi Hartmann are friends and have much in common, and both, working in out of the ordinary lines, are not popularly appreciated, and perhaps can not be.

One reason for this also is their indifference to success. Both have worked at every creation of their art for years, Mr. Ryder never exhibiting his pictures publicly, and Mr. Hartmann only publishing in limited editions. What the mass of human beings do, how they get along, their business and the cares which every hour brings with it, noise and ambition seem vain to them. Perhaps they have the feeling that these are not real, but illusions which lure humanity away from the true sense of living. They dislike the ordinary, and in their art presume that reality is illusion, that only art is happiness. Both are dreamers; Ryder is a dreamer of moonlight, Sadakichi Hartmann, of Oriental and luminous twilights; They walk through life, wherever they please, creating worlds of their own. Gardens bloom with heavy sleepbent flowers and jeweled colors, or a moon suffused silence lies on a shimmering glitter of the leaves.

They have the magic in them for creating stars and splendor out of themselves. Both live in out of the way places, and can be found

wandering under the heavens in lonesome spots and parks, drunk with nature's lavishness.

As to Sadakichi Hartmann alone, Mallarmé, the leader of the Symbolist School in Paris, has called one of his books "a vast fresco such as I dream should decorate the pleasure halls of future times."

Mr. Hartmann is a tall, gaunt figure with black disheveled hair, and a pale, dramatic complexion. Friends of literature have watched his endeavors, from his journalistic début in Boston, where he came, a youth of nineteen, and without further introduction than the magnetism of personality opened his way into the editorial columns of nearly every paper. From that time he has written now and then, not so much for money but for enthusiasm's sake, articles on contemporary literature and art which show a knowledge that probably stands unparalleled in this country. He wrote about Ibsen when no one here knew his name. He wrote essays on the leading most modern Scandinavian and Russian writers, and lectured on Marie Bashkirtseff long before her diary was published in England. Indeed, with the last-mentioned book, suggesting its translation, he went—and was received with indifference—to publisher after publisher in New York, who afterward would have been very glad to have accepted the opportunity for first introducing it. He was also probably the first to introduce the symbolistic school of writers to us, and worked with publishing houses for the introduction of the new artistic poster before anyone else did so.

All this pioneering he does, because of his rare æsthetic affection,—a foresight and a love of those things, which five years afterwards the world loves. It has been his pride to possess alone and first, beautiful things,—that others should learn from him what they should possess.

His fight for life has been fierce and incessant. It is still a struggle. He has known hunger. He has lived his writing. Stage carpenter at the Munich Opera House ;—a tramp in the streets of London ;—by some chance of luck living like a prince in Paris and on a trip through Holland ;—on the barricades during the miners' strike in Belgium ;—looking for work in the East side in New York ;—man of letters in all parts of the world,—these are some of the varied experiences through which he has passed.

If some time a great author comes,—whom perhaps the world effects,—who will tear the mask from life, so that we may look at the truth of beauty, then Sadakichi Hartmann may have been only a poor pilgrim who faltered on the way,—or, does he believe that he himself may be that one?

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